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Living with the Dead: A Sociological Analysis of Japanese and American Zombie Media

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LIVING WITH THE DEAD: A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF JAPANESE AND AMERICAN ZOMBIE MEDIA

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Introduction

Zombies are a household name. In recent years, they have taken over the media, leading to zombie walks, television shows, and even exercise apps created in their likeness. Zombies, no matter the type, have been a source of cultural intrigue and fear. However, what exactly is it about zombies that make them so horrifying? While the immediate threat of death is a large factor, there are other fears elicited by a zombie incursion. This paper aims to examine three visual medias via primary source analysis in order to figure out what other fears are incurred with zombie-based societal collapse. This paper aims to analyze *The Walking Dead*, *Zombieland,* and *I Am A Hero,* while providing cultural context regarding the creation of zombies so as to better understand these fears. Additionally, on top of being a primary source analysis regarding social fears, this paper aims to analyze it's visual media cross-culturally, comparing whether or not the fears shown in the films are the same in both American and Japan.

Each visual media was chosen for a specific purpose. *The Walking Dead* was chosen for its longevity and the country it was produced in. The show's run time increases the amount of information to draw from, leading to more substantial conclusions that of a movie. *Zombieland* was chosen specifically for how "American" it is in the scenes, characters, and plot. Lastly, *I Am A Hero* was chose due to the fact that there is very little information on Japanese zombie movies. This movie, however, not only got good reviews, but it also was a serious film, as opposed to the various parodies that were found while searching for source material. Additionally, because there is so little about Japanese zombie movies, *I Am A Hero* was also chosen due to its country of origin, allowing for a

cross-cultural analysis between American and Japanese zombie movies. Furthermore, the first section of the paper takes a look at the cultural origins of zombies, tracing their origins back to West African religions and Haitian Vodou, which referred to zombies as *nzumbi* and *zombi* respectively.

However, the *zombi* was eventually adapted to a different culture, gaining its own unique form as different cultures interacted and information spread. Depictions of zombies can be seen in these various cultures, which begs the question on whether or not the fear invoked by zombies has been changed by these cultures. Additionally, what is it that makes zombies such a visceral monster? By taking an in depth look into *The Walking Dead*, *Zombieland,* and *I Am A Hero*, I looked at what sort of fears zombies evoke on a sociocultural level and whether or not those fears differ based on the country in which the media is produced; specifically, America and Japan.

Zombies: A Horror Story in More Than One Way

Since George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* premiered in 1968, zombies have become a household name. Popular culture portrays zombies with the typical distinguishing traits: a rotting body, a hunger for human flesh, mindless shuffling, groaning, and that they can only be killed via the infliction of severe brain trauma—characteristics first popularized in Romero's film. *Night of the Living Dead'*s flesh-eating cadavers are the progenitors of the modern depiction of zombies, though not the first, as in 1932 Victor Halperin released *White Zombie*, which tells a very different tale to the modern zombie. In all actuality, zombies didn't originate as corpses driven to devour flesh. Of the 35 zombie-related movies released between *White Zombie* and *Night of the Living Dead*, only one alludes to "eating skin." However, a review by Peter Dendle, author of *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*, states that the movie *I Eat Your Skin* (1964), "…is as mild as horror gets, and nobody eats any skin" (Dendle 2000). Therefore, if zombies being undead cannibals is a relatively recent characteristic, what were zombies like beforehand? Better yet, where did the idea of zombies even originate? Few examples of zombies in media exist before Halperin's *White Zombie*. Where did zombies come from, and how did they become the nightmarish shadows of humanity represented in today's popular culture?

The answers to these questions won't be found on American soil. The modern day zombie might be an American creation, but its earliest predecessor was not. The online Oxford English Dictionary states that the word zombie comes from the Kikongo words *zumbi* and *nzambi*, which mean "fetish" and "a god," respectively ("zombie, n." n.d.). The article also goes on to mention that the term *zombie* or *zombi* originally referred to a

snake-god in the voodoo religion of West Africa. Various other sources contradict Oxford English Dictionary's translation of the words *nzambi* and *zombi,* stating that the first more closely translates to "spirit of a dead person," and that the second is a derivative of the *nzambi,* the Kikongo term for deity (Luckhurst 2015; Keegan n.d.; Derby 2015). In "Where do zombies come from?", Luckhurst also notes our modern day "zombie" could originate from the word *ndzumbi,* which means "corpse" in the Mitsogo language of Gabon (Luckhurst 2015). These other more credible translations all imply that the human being turned into a zombie is in some way deceased. While this may not seem significant at first, as pop culture currently equates zombies with reanimated cadavers and the walking dead, they weren't always considered that way. As evidenced by their language, however, the Gabon and the Congo people did consider their version of zombies to be undead.

Zombies themselves originated in West Africa, and the practices and beliefs revolving around them were brought over to the Caribbean Islands with the purchase and trade of slaves amongst the European powers. For the duration of this text, I refer to the traditional Haitian and West African zombie as "*zombi*" and its modern contemporary as "zombie." The history of the Haitian *zombi* not only has direct connotations to historical slavery, but also involves a more mystical and spiritual form of slavery. The z*ombi* originated in Haitian Voodoo, or Vodou, though the instance and circumstances surrounding a person's transformation into a *zombi* may vary. More often than not, *zombis* are created through magical means via a *bokor,* or a witch doctor. The reasons surrounding these magical *zombi* creations can range from simple annoyance to a need for labour. Accord-

ing to William Keegan, "a *zombi* is someone who has annoyed his or her family and community to the degree that they can no longer stand to live with this person" (Keegan n.d.). In other words, a *zombi* can be created simply because you have been an unproductive and annoying family member.

There is no set way for a bokor to transform a human into a *zombi*. Keegan notes that the application of a *coup poudre* (or a magic powder) is integral to the *bokor'*s zombfication process. This powder, when ingested, leads to the victim's apparent death, followed by their burial and exhumation after several days. The exhumed body is technically alive, but they remain under the bokor's power until the bokor dies. At first, this seems like quite the feat of necromancy. The sight of a previously dead body rising again to do the bidding of some unknown force or man is an incredibly vivid image, simply because there have been many movies and video games about zombies created through this premise, such as the *Resident Evil* series. Other sources claim that *zombis* were created through extremely similar means. Whether it was through magic, a secret potion, powerful hypnotic suggestion, or even an invocation of the spirits of the astral plain, *zombis* were created through the use of a third party, be it a bokor or a vengeful neighbor (Luckhurst 2015; McAlister 2012). There were no infections spread through bites, no diseases or plagues.

What there were, however, were men and women—bokors and neighbors alike—who were willing to override the agency of another human being for either their own means or those of another party. Another fascinating point to note is that these aren't just myths of a loss of identity and free will. There have been documented reports of different

people, notably white men and women, traveling to Haiti for either research or a "fascination" of the people there. Keegan notes one ethnobiologist named E. Wade Davis who traveled to Haiti following the reports of two dead men recently returned to the realm of the living (Keegan n.d.). While Davis came to a conclusion that the *zombis* were created through the means of a *coup poudre,* involving the highly toxic species of porcupine fish and puffer fish, other accounts don't come to such clean-cut endings.

Such accounts include the tales of William Seabrook and Zora Neale Hurston. The inspiration for *White Zombie*, a book entitled *The Magic Island,* by William Seabrook, contains a chapter called "Dead Men Working in Cane Fields" (as cited in Luckhurst 2015), wherein Seabrook is prompted to visit a Haitian-American plantation. Here Seabrook mentions that, "They were plodding like brutes, like automatons. The eyes were the worst. They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing," and his experience left him panicked, afraid of the superstitions surrounding the people of Haiti (as cited in Luckhurst 2015). Seabrook wasn't the only writer to visit Haiti and experience a *zombi* in the 1920s and 30s. Zora Neale Hurston, an esteemed black novelist and anthropologiest, wrote an informal travel book about Haiti, wherein she says that not only do *zombis* exist, but that she had the rare opportunity to interact with one (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. "Zombie" photographed by Zora Neale Hurston and published in *Time*, 13 Dec. 1937

Both Hurston and Seabrook were debunked, with many a critic and naysayer mentioning that perhaps they had just witnessed men and women who had experienced a societal death, who felt dead inside metaphorically, but who were very much alive (Luckhurst 2015). However, both of them report fleeing, from the plantation and the island respectively, because they felt an intense fear after witnessing and documenting these experiences. Something bothered them, and unfortunately, we'll never know if it was a fear induced by the mysticism of the island or from seeing men and women turned into psychological and emotional slaves after the 1791 Haitian slave rebellion freed the island many years ago.

Zombies, to those of us in the 21st century, have always represented the apocalypse in some form. Zombies have meant death and disease and having to prepare bunkers and caches of food. Those who grew up reading zombie comics or watching movies know to shoot for the head and to rebuild our society in some fashion after the inevitable apocalypse brought about by the undead. The *zombis* of Haiti mean something entirely different. The meaning behind the Haitian undead is rooted into something more visceral than a fictitious societal collapse. While such a fear may be founded due to the current political, environmental, and social climate of the United States as of 2017, such a collapse is still a "maybe," and not an absolute. *Zombis*, on the other hand, hold direct connotations to a dark and bloody history that the entire world participated in, perpetuated by the European continent and foisted upon countries less fortunate. From their loss of agency and the vacancy of their soul, to their deaths and rebirths, *zombis* are intertwined in the history and reality of the European slave trade. Lauren Derby notes that, "…slavery pro-

vided a deep structure within Haitian religious practices…" as the trade of people and goods spread its influence across the island, introducing various forms of religion, such as Theosophy, which has a focus on the soul (Derby 2015). The spread of religious ideals and European trinkets such as crystal balls blended West African spiritualism and led to what we now understand as Haitian Vodou. Further European influences involved the idea of the astral plain and astral bodies. More often than not, an invocation of dead or otherworldly spirit could lead to interactions with what has been termed the *"zonbi astral*," a complex spiritual formulae that separates body and soul and compels on or the other to work as a spirit or a slave (McAlister 2012). McAlister spent time in Haiti studying Vodou and her experiences with *zombis* are with those of the spiritual form, those that are called upon separate from a body and are then bound and used to perpetuate the castor's will. McAlister was baffled upon the realization that this people, this culture, that was so deeply brutalized by the slave trade could then turn around and do the same to the spirits and people around them. McAlister then made an interesting point: "Just as slavery depended on capturing, containing, and forcing the labor of thousands of people, so does this form of mystical work *reenact* the same processes in local terms" (McAlister 2012; emphasis mine). In other words, this isn't just the Haitian people repeating their past to a more accessible victim, but rather their own way of taking charge of their ancestors' slavery.

That zombies, our go-to figure of horror, were derived from the very real dehumanization of the West African and Caribbean populations is not surprising, considering the very real sense of death and the loss of free will associated with zombies. Depending

on the movie, you might not even see someone's transformation from a living, breathing person to a flesh-hungry monster. However, some depictions, such as in *The Walking Dead* (*TWD*), do show the horror of being bitten and the realization of impending death and resurrection. In Season One of *TWD*, the characters also get to view this metamorphosis from a third-person perspective with CDC doctor Jenner remarking that, "…the brain goes into shutdown, then the major organs. Then death. Everything you ever were or ever will be... Gone" (Fiero & Ferland 2010). Zombies in our contemporary view depict very visceral death, but more often than not media representations focus less on the actual death and more on the dehumanization of these bodies. The men, women, and children victims of "zombism" in contemporary popular culture are no longer human. They are a weapon, or a source of destruction, or a lab rat for testing. Once a person becomes a zombie, they are no longer human, and that is the sordid reality of both zombie media and slavery. Movies, television shows, and games will focus on how "it's okay to shoot them, they're no longer the person you knew and it's better if you put them out of their misery." What they don't focus on is that these people have just had their entire lives stolen from them and are now at the mercy of whatever virus or toxin ravages their bodies. Zombies are people who have lost all agency in their lives, and while zombies and *zombis* may differ in their creation, they both result in the same thing: loss of the "soul," if you will.

The shift from *zombis* to zombies is a shift from the spiritual to the scientific. The difference between the two and what they represent is fairly interesting. *Zombis*, created from spiritual invocations, are the direct result of someone wishing to enslave another

person or spirit, quite similar to its origins in the European slave trade. McAlister notes that, “The relationship between spirit worker and the dead is inherently unequal and exploitative,” much like the relationship between a master and a slave (McAlister 2012). Even in the modern-day cases of *zombis*, the men and women afflicted with these spirits have to be bought back from the forces binding them—a haunting echo of the Atlantic slave trade even if it was done to free someone from the evil-doer who had bound them to their will. What is interesting to note, however, is that in the transition from *zombi* to zombies, a very distinctive difference occurred, aside from the transition from spiritual infliction to scientific infection. Derby notes that regardless of how the zombie was created, there are two versions: the one in which the soul is without a body and inflicts its will upon others, and the one in which the body is without a soul and attacks those around it (Derby 2015). The second is the far more familiar tale of a zombie that we are used to hearing about.

The first type of zombie, the more traditional *zombi*, is a distinctly Haitian creation, existing in popular narratives about wealthy men and women with invisible minions working for them that are rarely seen but enact their will. The second type of zombie is that of the living corpse, the undead, the empty body given material weight and force after being robbed of its soul. When the U.S. Marines occupied Haiti from 1915-1934, they became fascinated with the idea of the *zombi*, or as it would come to be called in America, zombie. They spread sensationalist stories that eventually spawned the film and comic genre we all enjoy. A *zombi* “stresses the animating force at death and its ability to power spells and thus other bodies” (Derby 2015). The perspective of the US Marines, on the

other hand, focuses on the raw, brute, and often inert power that these soulless bodies possessed. The Marines saw only the dead brought back to life, the power and force of a body without a soul, mindless in its mission. They saw a loss of will, as in the first type of zombie, but to the Marines, these men and women were dead, not trapped within their own bodies.

While both of these types of zombie are essentially the same in that they represent a person whose agency has been stolen from them, a zombie is much more likely to cause massive amounts of physical harm as opposed to that of the Haitian *zombi*. The *zombi* more often than not required an invocation from a third party, an outside source who wanted to cause harm. A zombie, on the other hand, comes from no outside source aside from the initial outbreak. These corpses are soulless, thoughtless, and eternally hungry. There is no controlling them, at least in the more traditional American zombie media. The style of zombies in *Night of the Living Dead*, can't be controlled and anyone can be a victim, not just a specific person. This sort of fear makes zombie movies so popular and entrancing.

At its most base level, then, a zombie is an idea created through an amalgamation of religions and cultures, particularly through the Atlantic slave trade and the U.S. occupation of Haiti. Zombies are a mix of mysticism and science, of life and death, and of autonomy and slavery. The flesh-eating undead possess a much richer cultural history than one would believe having watched *The Walking Dead* or *Night of the Living Dead*. Even movies such as *Zombieland* don't show the sort of symbolism that first created zombies, because the American zombie has become its own entity. For clarification, the "American

zombie" is in reference to the fact that the idea of the zombie as we know it is an American creation and is different from the Haitian ideal of *zombi,* not because of a difference in modern cultural depictions cross culturally. It's no longer a creation of Vodou meant to teach a lesson or put someone to work. American zombies are meant to terrify in both active and passive roles. Whether the zombie is actively trying to eat the main character or not, it remains a constant threat throughout any media involving flesh-hungry cadavers.

The Abyss Looks into You: *The Walking Dead* and Human Monsters

The multitude of zombie movies created since *White Zombie* were followed in 2010 by a first-of-its-kind television show on AMC Network entitled *The Walking Dead.* The *Walking Dead* (*TWD*) is actually an adaptation of a comic book series written by Robert Kirkman. *TWD* follows the story of Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln), a police officer from King County, Georgia who awakens from a coma and is introduced to the zombie apocalypse. That introduction in itself already sets *TWD* apart from its contemporaries, due to the fact that most zombie media show the beginnings of the apocalypse to display the chaos and effects of societal collapse firsthand for the viewer. Given the fact that *TWD* is a television series, however, there is more than enough time for characters, flashbacks, and the settings themselves to show the viewer what happened while Rick was in a coma. However, aside from prolonged character development and backstory establishment, the fact that *TWD* is a television show and not a movie allows for even more conflicts to arise amongst the characters. According to Reed and Penfold-Mounce, "[t]he episodic nature of *The Walking* Dead as a television series allows the gradual introduction of survivors… [and] the imminence and possibility of death makes each scene more important and valuable" (2015). Admittedly, due to the series length, some of these conflicts begin to feel slightly repetitive, which will be discussed later. Nevertheless, *The Walking Dead* utilizes the advantages that being a television show grants it, and allows for a deeper look into the conflicts and fears that societal breakdown and governmental collapse can bring to survivors.

Conflict, Conflict, Conflict: A Look into *TWD*'s Disagreements and their Impact

The seventh season of The Walking Dead was finished on April 2nd, 2017 and season eight is in production, having stopped for a mid-season break in October of 2017. This chapter will examine season one, due to the fact that it establishes the universe and sets up the characters and tone for the rest of the series. However, instead of continuing to examine the show season by season, I will analyze *TWD* by its major conflicts. The major contentions that have occurred on *The Walking Dead*, aside from those created by the very real presence of the living dead, are that of The Governor, Alexandria, and Negan, all of which lead to strife and discord amongst the main cast survivors and imply a lot about how humans would react in a post-apocalyptic environment. After all, "zombies, and more particularly the zombie apocalypse, are a backdrop and context for human drama. They allow a commentary on issues of consumerism, interpersonal cooperation, and conflict, gender and race relations" (Reed & Penfold-Mounce 2015).

Season one: The establishment of what to fear.

Season one of *The Walking Dead* is the shortest of the seasons, with only six episodes. However, those six episodes go a long way in establishing the characters, their relationships, and how the zombie apocalypse was initially handled by both the government and the citizens. When Rick Grimes awakens in episode one, he's malnourished, healing from the gunshot wound that left him in a coma, and barricaded into a room in a hospital that has long been abandoned (Fiero & Ferland 2010). Rick is disorientated and horrified by everything he has seen in the hospital, and stumbles out into the sunlight. He wanders the town for a bit before seeing a figure and calling out to it for help; however, before he

can even realize that there is a zombie, or "walker," as the series terms them, he's smacked in the face with a shovel and the walker is shot in the head by another person. *TWD* starts the series and the season with a bang, both literally in terms of the gunshot and shovel to the face, but also in the fact that it captures the disorientation that's frequently overlooked in the high-paced nature of zombie movies with their limited run time. This episode also shows what happens to those left behind, given that Rick has no idea what he's doing or what is going on. If he hadn't been hit with a shovel, it is highly probable that he would have been killed in the first few minutes of his emergence from the hospital.

Nevertheless, season one of *TWD* establishes the trend for future conflicts, flitting between the expected zombie vs. human conflicts and the fears elicited by them, and the beginning of human vs human conflicts. As a whole, season one doesn't portray any human disagreements that can't be seen in another zombie movie. The initial fight is minor and comes about whenMerle Dixon (Michael Rooker) causes an altercation when the group of survivors with whom he's trapped on a roof encounter Rick. The fight between Merle and Rick is swiftly resolved (by Rick knocking out Merle), and the group continues to face the threat of the zombies trying to enter the building. Additionally, the group encounters another batch of survivors called The Vatos who kidnap Glenn (Steven Yeun), though it is later discovered that he was never in any danger.

The conflicts depicted in season one are extremely similar to the conflicts seen in *Zombieland* and *I Am A Hero*, both in the setting and the motivations depicted by the characters. All three at some point involve a conflict between someone who wishes to

take over leadership of the group, someone who disagrees with the direction the group is going, or someone trying to utilize their advantages to survive at the detriment of others. The altercation serves as a tense moment in the narrative and establishes the characterization of those involved. It isn't until later seasons that the altercations between both humans and zombies, as well as humans and humans, begin to complicate both the plot and the character development. At some point, zombies stop being a terrifying motivator for survival and become a tool to be used by humans. At the same time, people and what they can do to each other becomes much more terrifying.

The three main human vs. human conflicts that will be discussed in this paper are that of The Governor, Alexandria, and Negan.

The governor: Dystopian utopias and the fear of change

The conflict with The Governor begins in season three, when Rick's group has taken refuge in an abandoned prison. After some of the group is separated at the end of season two, Andrea (Laurie Holden) winds up in the small, but fortified, settlement of Woodbury, a town run by an enigmatic figure named The Governor. Andrea, accompanied by Michonne (Danai Gurira), is besotted with the man while Michonne is visibly distrustful of him. Sometime later, Merle kidnaps Glenn and Maggie (Lauren Cohan), leading to the revelation the Governor is a violent man who exerts a militaristic and tyrannical rule over the people of Woodbury, hidden behind a facade of peace and prosperity. This peace is lost when The Governor takes Michonne prisoner and she stabs him in the eye; the Governor then vows to destroy the home Rick and his people are creating, which furthers the conflict into season four.

The Governor and Woodbury reveal several disparaging facets about humanity. The necessity for something normal in a dystopia—a necessity for "what was" instead of establishing what will and what needs to be—drives the people of Woodbury. However, this utopia in chaos does not come without a price. The society's peacefulness hinges on the sacrifices of strangers and dissenters. Episode eight, "Made to Suffer," reveals that the peaceful, fifties-style town of Woodbury entertains a fighting ring in which combatants are made to fight to the death and then to fight zombies with nothing but their fists (Gierhart & Kirkman 2012). These circumstances are eerily similar to that of *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,* a short story by Ursula K. Le Guin. In this story, the happiness of a utopic community depends on keeping a young child in perpetual darkness and misery (Le Guin 1973). What is interesting to note in both this story and that of Woodbury is that the people are not ignorant of the misery they are causing. Adults and children alike in Woodbury go to watch the fights as a spectator sport, transforming a national fervor for sports into a community's fervor for blood.

The Governor and Woodbury represent the societal fear of widespread change. Whether the change is good or bad, there is always trepidation regarding the transition. However, in the zombie apocalypse there is almost no transition. A large portion of the plot is driven by the idea that no one can ever be truly safe—a theme that is expanded upon in later seasons. The Governor and Woodbury, having faced societal collapse, would rather have gone back to how it was at the sacrifice of others than to learn how to live in this new world and move on. They choose to mold themselves into a pre-existing schema in order to avoid what is occurring beyond their walls. This sort of mentality is

not new within American society, as with the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, American citizens chose to put greater power in the hands of the government so as to feel safer. These powers allowed for those in charge to "establish new crimes, new penalties and new procedural techniques for use against domestic and international terrorists" without having to go through all the hoops required due to fear ("USA PATRIOT…," n.d.). There was a sacrifice of checks and balances for safety, much as the people of Woodbury sacrificed certain freedoms to feel safe in the apocalypse. While *The Walking Dead* places an emphasis on the fear of death, given that this is a "primary human impulse," as noted by Niall Scott, it also places emphasis on how nothing can stay the same (Scott 2007). Despite the fact that Rick's group expresses a continuous need to establish place to live, season three (and the continuation of The Governor plot in season four) brings forth a creeping realization that they can't. According to Reed and Penfold-Mounce, the zombie apocalypse brings forth a fragmentation of not only identity, but the relational nature of biography, and the performative fluidity of social arrangements (2015). Who a person was no longer matters, state lines and country borders are obsolete, and the societal stigmas of before no longer hold power. With the apocalypse, the survivors begin to understand that nothing can stay the same and that everything continues to change, though it isn't until their encounters with The Governor that they begin to understand the permanency of their transient lifestyle.

Alexandria and Negan: Migration and the inability to stay safe

The Governor and the terror he brings to the protagonists is extended long past his tenure as a character. Rick's group becomes paranoid and far more willing to kill to pro-

tect those they love, which is an escalation of previous behaviors and a marked difference in their behavior. After season four, the group is scattered once again. A group led by Rick and Michonne make it to an apparent safe-zone called Alexandria, which is run by a women named Deanna (Tovah Feldshuh). However, although Alexandria seems to be running smoothly, there is dissension in the ranks, as a man named Gabriel begins trying to persuade Deanna that Rick and his group are too dangerous for the community (Lynch & Newgrete 2015). It seems that no matter the community, whether pre-or post-apocalyptic, there is someone or some group that wants things to be different. However, the group has their place solidified within the community when they defend it against both a zombie hoard and a violent scavenging group called The Wolves. Despite their experience with settlements that don't have a habit of lasting or containing benevolent leaders, Rick's group stays in Alexandria.

With so many people being lost and uprooted by the initial outbreak and the subsequent search for safety, it is natural that people would try to settle down and regain a stability that was lost with the apocalypse. However, in the act of settling down, society falls prey to one of its greatest fears, that of "illicit movements" (Reed & Penfold-Mounce 2015). Every new person is a suspect, and in every hand lies a potential weapon. There is no way to escape this development of suspicion, especially given the societal collapse that occurred. Each new community that the protagonists discover breeds an instant round of suspicion and fear. These attitudes aren't something new to the zombie apocalypse, however. The current political climate in America has seen an increased call for border control and anti-terrorism efforts. Since the election of Donald Trump as pres-

ident, there has been a call for stricter border control on the US-Mexican border, with even the House approving the legislation for a wall to be built. Additionally, in May of 2017, Congress approved the funding for an additional 5,300 detention beds for illegal immigrants (Chan, Weber, & Foo, 2017). Alongside stricter border control, the Trump administration also enacted a travel ban against certain countries. While he was not the first person to do so, his travel ban led to 60,000 visas being revoked, rattled the US markets, and led to further legislation limiting refugees (Chan, Weber, & Foo, 2017). Immigration and visas were already strict in the aftermath of 9/11, even 16 years after the fact, however the administration increased these fears and played on the suspicions of those they were "protecting." These same behaviors can be seen in each settlement shown in *The Walking Dead*.

The Walking Dead reflects this paranoia about "the Other" as it becomes increasingly clear that settlements are not all that they are made out to be. While there is safety in numbers and a stability afforded to the group by being able to stop and exist in a community setting, *TWD* sets a precedent that, "to move is to survive" (Reed & Penfold-Mounce 2015). The settlement of Alexandria offered the group stability and a home; however, Kirkman and AMC make a show of pointing out how stability is no longer an option. This is further supported by the weakness of Alexandria and the introduction of a new character, Negan.

In season six, Alexandria is breached by walkers and the community begins to face a food shortage. To alleviate this, a group is sent to negotiate with a nearby settlement called Hilltop. However, the group later discovers that Hilltop is being extorted for

food, medicine, and supplies under threat of attack by a group called The Saviors, run by Negan. Negan is a man who makes The Governor look relatively stable. Using force and fear, Negan controls a settlement called Sanctuary, and after he captures Rick's group, he manages to extort and threaten Alexandria into giving away their weapons and furniture (Nicotero & Newgrete 2016). Rick, after being nearly forced to cut off his son Carl's (Chandler Riggs) arm and after witnessing the violent bludgeoning of Glenn, backs down from being a leader and tells everyone to work under Negan so as to survive. Eventually, through a series of espionage-esque plans and networking, Rick's group allies with Hilltop and a settlement called The Kingdom, while brokering deals with a group called The Scavengers and Oceanside for assistance and weapons against Negan. This series of alliances and networking, along with the need for complete control and settlements, come from those who remember what life was like before society was dissolved under the force of the undead. Anyone who was born into the apocalypse, or young enough not to remember what society was like, would feel no need to force society into these pre-existing schemas unless taught. Reed and Penfold-Mounce note that, "the zombie distills agency down to movement, all other qualities are only lent by those seeking interpretations and understandings" (2015). Essentially, the fact that people place emphasis on the themes and qualities of life that no longer without a society to enforce them only perpetuates the continuing theme of never being able to have a stable home. By trying to force their lives into a shape that no longer exists, they set themselves up for failure when their homes cannot adapt and change along with the new dangers. However, while structure is required to avoid slipping into total anarchy, that does not mean that the shape a new socie-

ty takes must be the same as it was prior to the apocalypse. The zombies' roaming "lifestyle" and tendency to follow any noise or motion typically ensure that groups are constantly on the move. Social issues involving migration and diaspora, disease and its containment are emphasized in *The Walking Dead* simply due to the fact that that is now all that life is: wondering around, trying to find safety for the briefest of moments and avoiding infection.

The Walking Dead: When People are the Thing to Fear

The Walking Dead has been running for eight years at this point and still manages to capture the horror that comes with societal disintegration. However, despite how repetitive the plot can be (find home, lose home, find new home), the show manages to convey the societal fears invoked without being overly blatant. Each interaction on screen let's the viewer draw their own conclusions while making sure not to obfuscate the reasoning behind the fears elicited. The show exemplifies the overwhelming fear of change instigated by a loss of any sort of infrastructure and the attempts to bring it back, as well as the feelings of loss that diaspora and becoming a migratory society invokes. All of the main conflicts in *TWD* arise from various human groups, rather than from the zombies. While various zombie involve conflicts between humans, they are used as a means to an end, a plot device to continue the narrative. *The Walking Dead*, given the advantage of its longevity, takes human conflicts and turns them into overarching plots that can continue for seasons. *The Walking Dead* takes humanity and twists it only slightly so as to high-

light how in a world now espousing survival of the fittest, the humans are the scariest monster of all.

In the cases of Negan, The Governor, and the threats they pose to settlements trying to get by, zombies are just a precursor to the real threat. Rather than existing as a main threat, zombies become a tool for the human antagonists. The Governor uses them to incite fear and bring a thrill to cage matches, while Negan just takes advantage of the opportunities they present. According to Nathan Hunt, this is typical of zombie narratives outside of video games. He points out that, “films are heavily narrativized where the antagonist often becomes a figure or corporation rather than the zombies” (Hunt 2015). What makes zombies so scary in the case of this television show isn’t necessarily that they can kill someone, but that they can drive humans to commit unthinkable crimes. As urban spaces become dangerous, “private residences, streets, and places of worship can all equally provide the chance for a mortal encounter,” and as men, women, and children alike acclimatize to the zombie threat, they become desensitized and begin to look toward what *they* can do (Hubner 2015). In a world desensitized to the undead threat, humans become the real source of conflict. The characters no longer sustain a crippling fear of the walkers because they are a predictable threat, something with a pattern that can be learned. In *The Walking Dead*, humans are the real monsters, the real threats, and the real thing to fear.

Zombieland: Home of the Dead and American Clichés

While *The Walking Dead* is an excellent example of how American society reacts when faced with disintegration, its longevity as a television show sets it apart from shorter zombie movies. Though there have been many zombie movies since the turn of the century, *Zombieland* stands out. The movie, starring Jesse Eisenberg, Woody Harrelson, Emma Stone, and Abigail Breslin, premiered in 2009 to wild success. This movie, framed as an apocalyptic comedy horror, became the largest grossing zombie movie after Zack Snyder's remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), before *World War Z* would eventually surpassed it in 2013. Aside from its cast, *Zombieland* is also well-known for being comedic in both its plot and the portrayal of its characters. With twitchy Columbus (Eisenberg), manipulative Wichita (Stone), southern boy Tallahassee (Harrelson), and feisty Little Rock (Breslin), the cast of this zombie comedy brings humor to every situation. Whether it's bashing a zombie's head in inside a restroom or killing Bill Murray, humor is found around every corner. Although it is not the first zombie comedy of its type, it is one of the most memorable, alongside *Shaun of the Dead*, and the humor and action are fast-paced in equal measure. However, its success as a movie is not the main focus of this chapter. This chapter will analyze the American clichés represented throughout the movie, the specific fears invoked within the characters, and the significance of these. This section, like the previous section, is a primary source analysis meant to understand societal fears in zombie media and to parse out whether or not the culture that produced the media influences those fears.

American Values: A Look at Individualism, Sexism, and Over-Confidence

On a surface level, *Zombieland* could not be more "American" if it tried. The scenery, speech patterns, thought processes, scenes, and characters all bring about an image of stereotypical America. The very beginning of the movie drills into the audience that the setting is America, and for the duration of the movie, that thought never leaves. The opening scene of the movie is a close-up shot of a little American flag, with a distorted version of the national anthem playing in the background amidst gunshots and explosions (Fleischer 2009). Additionally, each character is named after an American city, having discarded their names for the sake of protection after the start of the zombie apocalypse. All of this establishes that the stereotypes and "feel" of America will be very prominent throughout the film.

Zombieland is rife with American stereotypes. Many can be seen just in the scenery, as the movie travels through long stretches of interstate and farmland with mom and pop gas stations, followed by tourist traps and ending at an amusement park. Additionally, the vernacular within the movie also continues to drive home how "American" the film is, with characters remarking toward a zombie that its "got a pretty mouth," or "Thank god for rednecks!" (Fleischer 2009). *Zombieland* blends horror with American clichés to produce its humor in an easily understandable way for its target American audience.

Many of the film's American stereotypes are seen most notably through the character of Tallahassee, a hot-headed man on a quest for a Twinkie. The viewer is first introduced to Tallahassee eight minutes into the movie. The man drives up to Columbus in a big black Cadillac Escalade with a white "3" painted on the side. Tallahassee is a rela-

tively tall and burly man. He steps out of the car dressed in the quintessential modern American cowboy get-up: cowboy boots, jeans, a leather jacket, aviators, and a cowboy hat. His voice is gruff, with a southern twang, and he's shown within seconds of his introduction to have a love for both guns and alcohol. However, it's not just his looks that make him an American cliché. Through both his words and his actions, the audience comes to see that he represents many facets of American life, such as individualism, subtle and not so subtle sexism, and overconfidence in the United States' superiority. Even his fervor to find a Twinkie in this post-apocalyptic society is reminiscent of what America values, as when Hostess said that they would stop making Twinkies, the country panicked until the announcement was rescinded. Either way, Tallahassee is set up within moments of his introduction as a "man's man" American of this post-apocalyptic society. Through him, the viewer is able to get a sense of what America values, starting with individualism.

Much has been written about American cultural individualism as opposed to other countries' collectivism. An article by Hui and Triandis defines individualism as, "an infrequency of perceived and enacted bonds with others…[the way] an individualist treats a neighbor is similar, in a certain sense, to how a collectivist would treat a stranger" (1986). On a sociocultural level, Americans and their families praise independence and working for oneself over dedicating one's life to the family. In American society, being an individual and being independent after a certain point in life is praised. Young adults are expected as they grow up to spread their wings and go forth to make their own families and forge their own paths. In collectivist cultures, the opposite is true, as those societies are

more family-oriented, where the children of the family are expected to grow up and continue taking care of their family and to provide for aging members. *Zombieland* establishes early on that to be alone or in a small unit is best, that family ties are only what a person makes of them, and that interpersonal relationships should stay on an impersonal level, as real names are replaced with the names of destinations. Tallahassee, upon being introduced to Columbus, says rather emphatically, "Stop. No names. Keeps us from getting too familiar," and while that could represent Tallahassee being the strong American male with no attachments, the namelessness of the characters is continued without being prompted (Fleischer 2009). Of the five named characters, only one possesses a name for the entirety of their screen time, while the rest are left with the names of cities. Each survivor is encouraged, whether on screen or not, to keep to themselves and to not let anyone else in, which is also shown through the sisters Wichita and Little Rock, as during one scene Little Rock recites a well-practiced line between her and her sister, "Trust no one, just you and me," which is echoed by Wichita (Fleischer 2009). Additionally, Tallahassee spends a large portion of the movie trying to keep himself closed off from the rest of the group, and it's not until they reach Hollywood that he opens up even a little about his past. However, for all of Tallahassee's glowing abilities as an apocalypse survivor, both he and the movie itself fall prey to a brand of subtle, and not so subtle, sexism.

Zombieland, like many films, uses women as mere plot devices, no matter how capable the women may be. Within the movie, there are two, arguably three, women introduced and "named," one of whom is only 12 years old. The first is alive for only a few minutes of screen time, and she is named 406, after the apartment she lived in. 406 lived

in the same building as Columbus, and during the beginning of the zombie outbreak she ran to his apartment for shelter. What is striking about this is that Columbus is a known shut-in by this point, preferring to avoid people, so the average movie goer would think that he would ignore her cries for help, especially when considering that Rule #17 on his survival list is "Don't be a hero." However, that thought changes upon hearing Columbus say, "I don't usually unlock my door to the sounds of panic, but my neighbor 406 is insanely hot" (Fleischer 2009). This willingness to only help because of her attractiveness not only demeans her value as a human, but shows one of Columbus' flaws: that he'll do anything for a pretty face. He's not creepy about it, and he does genuinely care about the people he meets in his zombie apocalypse journey, but this willingness to help due to attractiveness first and humanity second sets the tone for his initial interactions with Wichita and Little Rock.

The introduction of Little Rock and Wichita is initially set up so that the viewer underestimates them because they are women, which is one of the more subtle forms of sexism within the movie. Despite the fact that the apocalypse is cutthroat and ruthless, as evidenced by Tallahassee's suspicious nature and Columbus' rules, when the two meet Little Rock and Wichita, they soften toward them, simply because they are women. However, the film makes plain that Wichita was aware that something like this would happen, and she proceeds to use it as a form of self-defense, weaponizing her femininity. This isn't very blatant, as the viewers are set up to believe that she's always been a con artist and therefore always done this. And while she was a con before the apocalypse, that doesn't diminish the fact that in either setting, she was discounted as a threat because she

was a beautiful woman, and therefore needed to protect herself the only way she knew how. This is further evidenced when she states at the 26-minute mark, “Better you make the mistake of trusting us than us make the mistake of trusting you,” (Fleischer 2009). Even after Wichita and Little Rock con the two men and make off with their SUV and guns, the two don’t take them seriously upon their next interaction. This continues, as despite proving themselves capable, the two men take them at face value for another half hour or so in the movie. For instance, Columbus at one point remarks that, “[Wichita’s] not your typical hot, stuck-up bitch” (Fleischer 2009).

In American media, if a woman is strong, using her looks to survive and manipulate, she’s labeled a “bitch” or “cold-hearted.” Some portrayals take that as a compliment; however, the fact that women standing up for themselves is seen as “unattractive” or “aggressive” or “mean” is ridiculous. It shouldn’t be an American value that women need to be lesser, or somehow need to have a man to “warm their hearts” or save them in the climax of a movie. In an article by Cady and Oates, the authors remark that,

> “the persistence of sexual traditionalism remains a potent, almost irresistible salve to ease the anxiety of social competition and collapse in these motion pictures. Many female main characters in 21st-century zombie movies embody physical strength and emotional toughness in the heat of a zombie attack, while happily coupling in domestic tranquility after the threat has passed” (2016).

Female characters are utilized in post-apocalyptic movies to create the sort of nuclear family that is a salve for the viewers and characters in a world without order. Though the

women may be strong and independent, this independence is undermined by their need to create a heteronormative family structure.

In American society, children are taught from a young age that boys are not to show weakness, that they are to be tough and strong and never back down. While this is not the case with Columbus, who learns throughout the movie how to be strong and confident in his own right, this American truism is shown in Tallahassee from the moment of his introduction. Tallahassee frequently demonstrates this American mentality through scenes that are meant to show his confidence, prowess, and dominance. He's shown being senselessly violent, though Columbus says that's just so he doesn't go crazy in the apocalypse, and his overconfidence is both supported and denied in equal measure throughout the movie. At one point, Columbus states something that vaguely implies he's more intelligent than Tallahassee, to which Tallahassee replies, "Wanna feel how hard I can punch?" which further establishes him as the stronger man of the two of them. However, this confidence is challenged when Wichita and Little Rock essentially kidnap the two men. At this point, Tallahassee begins to provoke the 12-year-old Little Rock, stating, "Like you would ever use that thing [his gun]" and his confidence promptly flies out the window when Little Rock shoots it into the air, as he yells out, "Don't kill me with my own gun!" (Fleischer 2009). What makes Tallahassee interesting as a character and as a representation of American clichés is that his weaknesses and growing care for the people in his group make him more human. His transition from a loner to part of a unit is also a demonstration of the motivating factor involved in one of the more common fears associated and resolved in zombie movies, isolation.

Societal Fears: Isolation, Migration, and Societal Breakdown

In many television shows and movies set during an apocalypse, regardless of whether they involve zombies, men and women alike find themselves isolated and alone, searching for people or family, much like in the first season of *The Walking Dead*. This theme is readily seen within just the first few moments of *Zombieland*, in the voiceover narration of Columbus. In the beginning of the movie, he's alone, and only teams up with Tallahassee because they're going the same way. They have no intention of staying together, and certainly no intention to stay with the girls that stole from them. However, they find that by the end of the movie they would rather be together than alone, because being alone is worse. Human beings are extremely social creatures, and though some may prefer to be alone for the majority of the time, they still don't prefer total isolation. *Zombieland*, with its minimal cast and open empty landscapes, paints the perfect picture for isolated, transitory individuals coming into contact with each other and resolving their loneliness.

Although America is an individualistic society, individualism becomes a downside in this film. Loneliness and isolation are prevalent main topics, even if they aren't the main plot, simply because of how many times they get mentioned either directly or in passing. For instance, in the very beginning of the movie, Columbus remarks that, "[He's] come to realize that you can't have a country without people. And there are no people here" (Fleischer 2009). Whether or not it's a remark on his own fears of isolation, it is a mark on how in a zombie apocalypse, everyone loses someone. Isolation is very

real due to separation or choice, and some within the zombie universe refuse to make bonds with people to avoid losing them again. It is almost paradoxical how American individuality is prized as heroic, but when society has collapsed, being alone comes to be seen as almost an anathema. Zombie movies especially note that there is safety in numbers, and encourage the creation of found families, which directly contradicts the mentality that a person needs to be a pillar unto themselves. Much like how America has encouraged both global isolationism and global intervention, zombie movies encourage the individual while at the same time encouraging social dependence.

Interestingly enough, Columbus sees his lack of relationships prior to and after the apocalypse as a good thing. To him, not having relationships meant that he had nothing to lose, which is a stance many adopt in the genre of zombie horror. At one point he remarks that he, "had the advantage of never having any close friends or family members" (Fleischer 2009). This argument—that emotional ties are more damaging in a life-or-death setting—is further compounded through the revelation that the reason Tallahassee is the way that he is, is due to his own loss. Tallahassee lost his son to zombies, and therefore takes a great pleasure in destroying them, with Columbus remarking that, "he [Tallahassee] really hated them." These feelings of disconnect from others and of finding an advantage in being alone continue throughout the movie, though more in the background than anything. This mentality continues until Columbus and Wichita almost kiss, at which point Columbus realizes that he'd rather be with her than alone. However, that doesn't change the fact that the isolation one faces during a breakdown of societal structure is mentally and emotionally scarring. During a moment of reflection, Columbus

starts to change his feelings on isolation being an advantage, though he still doesn't see it as necessarily a bad thing, as he muses on how he's, "not sure what's more tragic: that my family is gone or that I never really had much family to begin with…we're all orphans in zombie-land" (Fleischer 2009). It's less of an emphatic cry and more of a bland statement when heard in Eisenberg's voice. The inflection implies care, but the delivery leaves the viewer wondering if he thinks being an orphan in the apocalypse is a good thing. Either way, the loneliness and subsequent migration that people face within zombie movies is a common theme that leads to fears of isolation and death, though death is already a constant.

Interestingly enough, these fears are an evolution of those invoked in 1980s American zombie movies. When George Romero reinvented the zombie genre, he brought with it a new flair that led to an evolution reflecting current societal issues. In the 1980s, zombies represented a fear of being kept artificially alive, "beyond health, happiness, or social utility" due to the ever-increasing strides of the medical industry and a "deep seated anxiety about society, government, individual protection, and an ever increasing disconnectedness" (Dendle 2007). That fear of not being able to have protection and the feeling of increasing disconnectedness continued into the 21st century. However, it also evolved past a fear of loosing one's identity and into a fear of a "lack of control, dignity, and direction" (Dendle 2007). In addition to representing the fears invoked by isolation, *Zombieland* also demonstrates fears regarding a lack of control and direction, as seen by Columbus. A main theme of *Zombieland* is Columbus' rules, ranging from numbers one and two, "cardio" and "double tap," respectively, to number thirty-one, "enjoy

the little things." In a society that has faced a complete collapse of structure, there are those who revel in it, and those who decide to create their own rules and restructure their lives. Columbus's rules are more than just a personal need for this character—these rules are represented in other movies and shows where society is attempting to reconstruct and assign rules to a now lawless place. This kind of widespread panic and inability to bring order to chaos is a further fear faced by survivors of the apocalypse.

Zombieland: A Migratory Tale of Loneliness, Sexism, and Fear

Zombieland is part of the 21st century's revival of zombies in mainstream media for a reason. It not only introduced humor to the zombie horror genre, but it also represented societal fears in a subtle way. This film provides a look on how a zombie apocalypse can shape society, how people can act on their fears, and how they interact with each other when normal social structure is gone. *Zombieland* displays both current American attitudes and the fears shown through a societal collapse.

With the turn of the century and the events of 9/11, many Americans feared incursions from all sides, an attack from within, and a government collapse. *Zombieland* and many movies like it portray this to an astonishing degree, often managing to be quite similar to each other while still being unique. Though *Zombieland* doesn't encapsulate the idea of "society [as] a victim of both the monster without and the monster within" that other zombie movies may illustrate, it still manages to let the audience experience a vicarious expression of their own desires and fears (Dichter 1960). Through a never-ending search for a safe place, often taking groups across state and county lines that no longer

matter, the zombie genre tests audiences with the question of “What would you do if society broke down?”

However, whilst most zombie apocalypses happen around the world, it is rare that a film will address what is happening globally or in areas outside of the main characters perception. In addition to that, there is much less zombie media in Japan than there is inside it. Since the first zombie movie, *White* Zombie by Victor Halperin, in 1937, there have been 35 zombie movies released in American, while there have only been 14 released in Japan. I would like to preface that those 14 Japanese zombie movies are those that were found when using Google filter to narrow down from movies to Japanese to zombies. Having said that, it is possible that my numbers are off, however based on the limited lists about Japanese zombie movies, there are still less produced in Japan than that of America. So that begs the question: what are zombies like in other countries and do they invoke the same sort of fears in their characters and audiences, or do zombie movies in other countries differ due to cultural values?

I Am a Hero: A Look into the Japanese Zombie Mythos

America is well-known for its zombie movies, having been the first to popularize them; however, other countries have produced their own since *The Night of the Living Dead* premiered in 1968. Interestingly enough, there are fewer Japanese zombie movies (as mentioned at the end of the last section) than American zombie movies, and this deficit makes it that much more important to study Japanese zombie films and add to the discourse. Directed by Shunsuke Sato, *I Am a Hero* (2015) is actually an adaptation of a manga (Japanese comic book) by the same name. Starring Yô Ôizumi, Kasumi Arimura, and Masami Nagasawa, *I Am a Hero* follows the story of Hideo Suzuki (Ôizumi), an aspiring manga artist with a license for a shotgun he never uses. As his relationship with his girlfriend Tekko starts to fall apart, he begins hearing strange stories on the news of people being bitten and losing their minds. This chapter aims to examine at the sociocultural values shown throughout this film and their influence or lack thereof on the fears elicited within the characters.

Japanese Cultural Values: A Look at Collectivism and Anxiety

As a manga adaptation, *I Am a Hero* needed to stay true to its origins or it would have faced persecution from fans. Because of this, there is no doubt that *I Am a Hero* is anything other than a Japanese film. While this could have just as easily been filmed in another country, the movie stays true to the setting established in the manga and very clearly paints itself as a town within Hiroshima. From shoes being left at the door upon entering a building, to the in-movie media, such as news reports and television shows, *I*

Am a Hero establishes itself well within the borders of Japan both geographically and culturally.

However, this doesn't mean that the movie is without its Western influences. The American influences in the film's dialogue and music create an interesting dichotomy with the traditional Japanese values. However, one has to take into account the fact that both America and Japan are countries with a large amount of influence on one another. Japan and America have a long history of trade with each other, and are the key economies involved in an effort to broaden and deepen trade and investment among Pacific countries (Stokes 2015). Therefore, it's difficult to imagine a Japanese movie involving a genre that was first created in America *not* containing some sort of homage. Additionally, this isn't an uncommon occurrence, as Leung Wing-Fai notes that Japanese zombie films "rarely reference traditional folklore that has been a central source in the history of Japanese horror cinema" and that it is a result of "cultural borrowing from mainly American popular culture and an eclectic mix of generic influences" (Wing-Fai 2011). What is interesting to note, however, is that *I Am a* Hero appears very self-aware in regard to this fact. Hideo himself comments on the difficulties of Japanese visual media being seen as stand-alone, a media too limited in its presentation to be spread to other countries without the cultural borrowing required to spread its influence. Hideo notes that, "Due to the language barrier and cultural differences, it's hard to take the lead in the world. It's too limited" (Sato 2015). The American influence within the film is noticeable, but not in a way that detracts from the film. The film itself draws from the zombie movie cliché of utilizing a shopping district and rooftop for safety established by Romero. Additionally, Hideo

and Hiromi (a young girl who Hideo teams up with) both utilize the song “Home on the Range” to calm themselves down in times of stress.

Regardless of the American influence within the movie, the characters generally conform to what is expected from Japanese society. The beginning of the film emphasizes that, prior to the apocalypse, people Hideo’s age (early thirties) are already settled down and supporting their wives and children. This belief falls well within the realm of collectivism as opposed to individualism, as people within collectivist cultures tend to, “prioritize group goals over personal goals because failure to do so can result in punishments from the other members of the group, whereas the pursuit of group goals can result in approval” (“Collectivistic Cultures” n.d.). Additionally, since collectivism encourages working for one’s family over working for one’s self, the culture leans toward interdependence rather than independence. Hideo, however, lends himself toward a more independent frame of mind as he would rather follow his dream than get a job to support both himself and his girlfriend Tekko. However, Tekko, a more traditional woman, begins to resent him for it, saying, “Only a small, special group of people can achieve success,” implying that Hideo is not a part of that group because he’s been chasing his dream of being a mangaka (manga artist) for fifteen years (Sato 2015). Given that people from collectivist cultures are more likely to have an interdependent view of themselves and define themselves by their relationships, this need to succeed and provide for his girlfriend over his dreams is typical (Hopper 2015). Furthermore, Tekko implies that there is a time limit within this cultural stigma as she laments to Hideo that, “[she is] already thirty-four years old, you know?” (Sato 2015). Tekko and Hideo represent two sides of the spectrum in

this case, as while Hideo conforms to various other Japanese cultural standards, he would rather work for his dream, whereas Tekko would rather he work for them and their relationship.

However, these collectivist ideals cease to exist once society collapses. Although working for others continues to be a theme, providing for (a future) family becomes less important than Hideo protecting Hiromi when she can't protect herself. However, Hideo has his own issues in regard to that. Hideo wants to protect Hiromi, but he finds himself facing a mental battle, unable to gather the courage to use his gun and protect until the end of the movie. Throughout the movie, Hideo suffers from low self-esteem and perhaps even some form of social anxiety. He's visibly awkward in social settings, as seen by his hunched shoulders and inability to maintain eye contact when trying to get his manga approved by a publisher. Additionally, the viewer witnesses how he wishes he could be, as there are many scenes in which Hideo imagines himself being bolder and able to fire his shotgun. Some scenes show him escaping from an area only to be killed, which repeat multiple times as he tries to get over his anxieties and gather his courage.

Hideo's anxiety has cultural significance, considering the culturally bound form of social anxiety called *Taijin Kyofusho* common within collectivist cultures such as Japan and Korea. According to the DSM-5, *Taijin Kyofusho* is a "cultural syndrome characterized by anxiety about and avoidance of interpersonal situations due to the thought, feeling, or conviction that one's appearance and actions in social interactions are inadequate or offensive to others" (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Even though this is an extreme case of social anxiety, and Hideo may not possess it, studies into *Taijin*

Kyofusho have revealed that collectivistic ideals might increase the possibility of developing anxiety. According to an article by Vriends et al., “Several studies found a positive association between an interdependent self-construal and TKS, and a negative association between an independent self-construal and TKS” (Vriends et al. 2013). Therefore, it is possible that the anxieties displayed by Hideo are actually a metaphor for the anxieties that a modern Japanese man may experience. This is further evidenced in an article by Kleinknecht, Dinnel, and Kleinknecht which states that, “The cultural basis of the fear and avoidance then is that the behavior of one member of an in-group will bring shame or embarrassment upon the group as a whole” (Kleinknecht, Dinnel, & Kleinknecht 1997). Hideo’s reluctance to do much of anything that goes against society, his inability to speak up for himself amongst his group of manga assistant friends, and the pressure his girlfriend places him under lend credence to the fact that he may be suffering from anxiety. This is due to the sociocultural constraints placed upon him by a collectivist society. However, given that Hideo only has prolonged interactions with Yabu (Nagasawa), Hiromi, and his girlfriend, any conclusions regarding his social anxieties are draw from a small subject pool.

Societal Fears: The “Other” and the Violation of Self

What sets *I Am a Hero* apart from other zombie media is that in this film, the zombies retain some sense of self. In direct opposition to this, Niall Scott states that, “zombies cannot retain a sense of self” and Peter Dendle writes that, “zombification is the logical conclusion of human reductionism,” essentially stating that zombies are simp-

ly a body with motor functions (Scott, 2007; Dendle, 2007). *I Am a Hero* defies these conceptions of zombies, as the zombies portrayed within this film not only retain the ability to speak, but a few show low levels of planning. In a conversation with a rooftop survivor and former nurse named Yabu, Hideo learns that, "All of the ZQN [zombies] are living in their past memories" (Sato 2015). If a person became a zombie while they were working as a host in a restaurant, even in death they will continue to utter phrases like, "Welcome, how many today?" or "Thank you for coming!" Abe, one of the survivors Hideo meets, points out his wife Kyouko, continuing to try and shop from a store, snarling out, "I want that one, I want that one!" Zombies have always invoked fear due to their ability to turn an able-bodied man into a mindless flesh-eater, as discussed in the previous section. However, they also have a powerful effect psychologically due to their "in-transition" state of being neither alive or dead (Hubner, Leaning, & Manning 2014). Zombies without cognition are terrifying enough due to their ability to rob a person of their agency and to turn family against family in a mindless craze. "They represent an even greater danger to survival than a mere corpse by abbreviating the threat of death," making death no longer a certainty or a finality (Scott 2007). But what does it mean for humanity when the zombies threatening society retain a sense of self?

The retention of self in this film makes the zombies even more terrifying. A majority of zombie media draw a clear distinction between "alive," "dead," and "zombie." Characters often hesitate when confronted with a zombified loved one, but it is usually still very clear that the loved one is a zombie, not something in-between. Since the zombies retain a sense of self in *I Am a Hero*, the audience is forced to wonder whether or not

their cognition has been halted to only repeat what they were doing before death, or whether or not the person—the self—is trapped inside the body. The zombie has always been an interesting representation of the interdependency of the human self and monstrous other, a combination of human likeness and inhuman hunger (Scott 2007). However, the zombies in *I Am a Hero* further blend the two together, creating a terrifying dichotomy.

On a sociocultural level, this representation of zombies represents a disconcerting question: at what point does one decide whether or not someone is too far gone? Even within the film, Hiromi becomes halfway infected, lending to the idea that zombification is not the be-all, end-all in this film that it is in others. The cultural fear of zombies from the last section involved the loss of self and identity, but the zombies in *I Am a Hero* have not lost their self-identify or their capacity for volition, a facet that Niall Scott includes in his zombie paradigm (Scott 2007). Although the capacity for volition is greatly reduced in the zombies of *I Am a Hero,* in one scene from the film a zombie makes a "conscious" decision to try and get onto a rooftop, which is highly unsettling.

By presenting zombies with the ability to make a basic plan, as well as the ability to speak their final words, *I Am a Hero* creates a zombie that almost seems to capture the human essence rather than discard it in favor of inhumanity. The fear that this invokes isn't necessarily bound by culture. If the same concept had been applied to an American film, the idea of the self being trapped within a zombie instead of destroyed would have instilled the same sort of fear within the viewer. While *I Am a Hero* introduced a new fear with this new type of zombie, the sociocultural fears discussed in this chapter are similar

to the *Zombieland* section. *I Am a Hero* portrays a fear of isolation, as evidenced by the fact that people continue to band together to create a semblance of society no matter how it goes wrong. The film also represents a fear of societal collapse, as evidenced by the fact that Hideo continues to cling to the rules of pre-apocalyptic Japan. At various points throughout the movie, Hideo mentions that he can't take his gun out in public because of the gun control laws and that he's legally not allowed to let someone else handle his weapon. These rules no longer apply to this zombie-filled world, but Hideo clings to them as they are a sense of structure in a crumbling society. Both Japanese and American zombie films share these fears, albeit represented through different cultural lenses.

I Am a Hero: A Tale of Collectivism, Anxiety, and Similarity within Differences

I Am a Hero is a tale of finding the courage to do what one needs to do, as explored through the nerdy Hideo. Throughout Hideo's journey to trust himself, he faces the quintessential problems a man in his thirties is expected to face. He's being pressured both socially and emotionally to give up his dream and get a job that will be able to support both himself and his girlfriend. The social pressure of collectivism to sacrifice one's own ambitions for the sake of the other is the first conflict Hideo faces. Coupled with the social anxiety he already has, the zombie apocalypse is just another stressor.

However, *I Am a Hero,* for all its culturally relevant additions to the zombie horror genre, is similar to its American counterparts in the fears that it invokes in viewers. The differences between *I Am a Hero* and *Zombieland* lie in the setting, mannerisms, and character development rather than the fears invoked. With so little literature dedicated to

Japanese zombie media, it’s important to understand these films from a sociocultural standpoint and discuss how they fit into the history of the genre and how they compare to their Western counterparts.

Conclusion

Since George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, zombies have become a household name. They incite fear and intrigue, and bring terror to the average movie goer or television watcher. The fear they insight is no less then the average horror movie, however zombies themselves represent a series of sociocultural and political fears that are buried beneath their frightful dispositions. However, these fears weren't created at the inceptions of the modern zombie. The idea of zombies has been around for as long as Haitian Vodou has existed, with a cultural history that runs to the heart of West Africa. From the loss of will inflicted through the whims of witch doctors, to the flesh eating corpses of modern media, zombies have always been a source of cultural intrigue. The fears in which they induce, however, have been subject to change as generations grow and adapt. Because of this fact, what zombies represent on a sociocultural level today is different to what they represented only twenty years ago. Through first person analysis supplemented with secondary source research, zombies and the plots they derive represent a host of different fears and stigmas. Through both overt and subtle methods, *Zombieland, I Am A Hero,* and *The Walking Dead* encapsulate the obvious fears of death and societal collapse, while also showcasing more subtle fears and societal inequities that get thrown to the wayside in a throwaway joke or passing comment.

In *The Walking Dead*, humans are what one should fear the most. Zombies, while still a constant threat, are easy to learn to kill and to evade. Humans, with their resources and paranoia, bring an entirely different danger to the apocalypse. Whether it's their overt wish to kill all in their path or the more subtle aggressions created by a need to protect

one's own, humans are the most dangerous part of the apocalypse in *TWD*. That's not to say that they aren't a danger in *Zombieland* and *I Am a Hero*, but rather that they are one of, if not the, main aggressor in *The Walking Dead*. *Zombieland* brings about a different set of fears as the societal collapse heightens fears of isolationism and migration, while exacerbating the presence of sexism and individualism. *Zombieland* exhibits the dangers of being alone while still maintaining a veneer of individualism and the group learns that being alone is more horrifying than being together. While there is still human vs. human conflicts, they are brief and humorous as opposed to murderous like in *The Walking Dead* and *I Am a Hero*. All three visual medias pay special attention to the stress that is created by diaspora, though creator emphasis is places on this theme in the two mentioned previously. *Zombieland*, however, placed greater emphasis on bonds forged through necessity and adversity than the other two visual medias. Additionally, *I Am a Hero,* through the unique depiction of zombies, placed a larger emphasis on the loss of self and the fear of one being trapped as a zombie and losing their free will.

On a sociocultural level, there didn't appear to be any major differences in the fears elicited through societal disintegration. All three visual medias showed fears relating to death, migration, isolation, and the self. Additionally, all three espoused the idea of being able to settle down in the apocalypse and create life anew through various types of settlements. Unfortunately, each of those settlements were ruined in one way or another, and led to various characters having to continuously move around, therefore increasing the fears associated with diaspora and immigration. While *I Am a Hero* differs culturally on a service level, being set in Japan rather than America, the fears shown once society

had collapsed very rarely differed cross-culturally. The American responses seen in *Zombieland* and *The Walking Dead* were similar to that of *I Am a Hero*, even if the events preceding the reactions were different. However, one potential difference that could be looked into would be that of anxiety levels in other countries upon societal disintegration. While the fear experienced may not be different, it is possible that the reactions to stressors in the apocalypse may differ from country to country, which is something to examine in the future.

However, the lack of major differences isn't a bad thing. From the primary analysis of the three visual medias, it was found that both cultures essentially experienced the same fears, as stated in the previous paragraph. What makes that important, however, is that in each visual media, the same fears were represented in different ways. Zombies may be scary for same reasons, however these reasons are then colored by extremely different things. In the *I Am A Hero* section, *Taijin Kyofusho* is discussed as being a cultural reason for Hideo's acute fears, a reason for the already present fears of the apocalypse to be exacerbated. The two movies and the television show both show the fears associated with diaspora and migration and death, but how they are presented to the audience varied due to the culture in which the media was produced. This is important because it emphasizes the idea that when society collapses, the fears associated with this collapse are universal. The only difference amongst the fears is the ways in which they are expressed: either through a Japanese or American cultural lens.

This primary source analysis of American and Japanese zombie media may not be groundbreaking, however it is still important. Not only is it important because it allows

for a historical record of the fears exhibited by these two cultures, but it adds to the narrative of Japanese zombie movies. There is little to no literature or research into zombie movies within Japan. Of the research that I found, it was more specific to the Japanese zombie-comedy, than it was zombie-horror. Due to this revelation, this paper and the research within is important because it adds to the narrative. Despite the fact that the sociocultural fears exhibited by all three medias didn't differ by culture in a major way, the different facets of life that the movies and television show display reveal matter. The fears shown not only say a lot of our society now, outside of the apocalypse, but they also act as markers for how our societies fears have grown and changed over the years. Just as zombie movies has changed throughout the years, so have the fears exhibited within them. Being able to follow these changes and understand their importance from a sociocultural and historical standpoint is just as important as adding to the narrative.

Having said that, there is still room for improvement and research. Not only does Japanese zombie media require more primary source analysis, but there should also be more cross-cultural analysis. However, the research does not need to be limited to Japanese and American zombie movies. Other countries have their own visual media to contribute to the narrative, such a Spain's *[Rec]* and England/America's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Future research could also expand the research, focusing perhaps less on zombie movies in particular but the fears associated with different apocalyptic scenarios, such as nuclear war or disease. With so little being written and researched about post-apocalyptic fears, stressors, and responses in visual media, it is important to look into

these films, and those like them, so that we may better be able to understand the sociocultural fears of the current generation.

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